EXAMINING THE ROLE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND BRAND IMAGE AS MEDIATORS BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND REPURCHASE INTENT WITH REFERENCE TO INDIA’S INTERNATIONAL AIRLINES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study's overarching goal is to use findings on the associations between airline passengers’ perceptions of service quality, brand image, and customer satisfaction to forecast whether or not those customers would return for future flights.

Theoretical framework: Maintaining service quality is critical for customer retention in the aviation industry since customers have high expectations for exceptional service. Thus, the fundamental significance of service quality lays the foundation for developing a theoretical framework in this study.

Method: The hypothesis was tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) on a convenience sample of 423 respondents who travelled on India’s International Airlines (IIA), and the data were examined using statistical software packages such as Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive research is suggested as the approach of choice.

Results and conclusion: The results indicate that service quality has a strong positive effect on repurchase intention, as well as mediated by customer satisfaction.

Research implications: The research findings have several implications for the aviation industry, emphasising the significance of incorporating service quality guidelines into the training of airline staff. This approach can enhance customer satisfaction; thereby instilling the customer’s repurchase intent.

Originality/value: The study presents a unique and original contribution to the existing research literature. The results are particularly valuable as they explore a combination of variables that have not been previously investigated in the aviation industry with such precision.

Keywords: Airline Industry, Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction, Repurchase Intention, Service Quality, SERVQUAL Scale.

EXAMINAR O PAPEL DA SATISFAÇÃO DO CLIENTE E DA IMAGEM DA MARCA COMO MEDIADORES ENTRE A QUALIDADE DO SERVIÇO E A INTENÇÃO DE RECOMPRA COM REFERÊNCIA ÀS LINHAS AÉREAS INTERNACIONAIS DA ÍNDIA

RESUMO

Objetivo: O objetivo geral do estudo é usar as descobertas sobre as associações entre as percepções dos passageiros das companhias aéreas sobre a qualidade do serviço, a imagem da marca e a satisfação do cliente para prever se esses clientes retornarão ou não para voos futuros.

Referencial teórico: Manter a qualidade do serviço é fundamental para a retenção de clientes no setor de aviação, pois os clientes têm grandes expectativas de um serviço excepcional. Assim, o significado fundamental

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Examining the Role of Customer Satisfaction and Brand Image as Mediators Between Service Quality and Repurchase Intent with Reference to India’s International Airlines

Método: A hipótese foi testada usando Modelagem de Equações Estruturais (SEM) em uma amostra de conveniência de 423 entrevistados que viajaram na International Airlines (IIA) da Índia, e os dados foram examinados usando pacotes de software estatístico como Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) e Statistical Package for Ciências Sociais (SPSS). A pesquisa descritiva é sugerida como a abordagem de escolha.

Resultados e conclusão: Os resultados representam que a qualidade do serviço tem um forte efeito positivo na intenção de recompra, bem como através da mediação da satisfação do cliente.

Implicações da pesquisa: Os resultados da pesquisa têm várias implicações para a indústria da aviação, enfatizando a importância de incorporar diretrizes de qualidade de serviço no treinamento do pessoal da companhia aérea. Essa abordagem pode aumentar a satisfação do cliente, estimulando assim a intenção de recompra do cliente.

Originalidade/valor: O estudo apresenta uma contribuição única e original para a literatura de pesquisa existente. Os resultados são particularmente valiosos porque exploram uma combinação de variáveis que não foram investigadas anteriormente na indústria da aviação com tanta precisão.

Palavras-chave: Indústria Aérea, Imagem de Marca, Satisfação do Cliente, Intenção de Recompra, Qualidade de Serviço, Escala SERVQUAL.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of the challenging business environment in the aviation sector, prioritizing customer retention and sustainability becomes crucial. The cost of acquiring new customers exceeds that of keeping existing ones in service sectors. Hence, it is imperative for the aviation sector to enhance its service standards and uphold a consistent level of quality. The frequent customer complaints in the aviation sector stem from their dissatisfaction caused by inadequate service provision. Passengers who are unsatisfied have the choice to discontinue their patronage of a particular airline. Therefore, the aviation sector focuses its efforts on implementing strategies that ensure customer retention by delivering exceptional services. Improving the quality of services has become a vital approach to retaining customers and establishing a positive brand image. The quality management principles aim to enhance customer satisfaction by providing more satisfying experiences. Customer satisfaction and their perception of an airline's service quality directly impact their inclination to select that airline for future flights.

In today's competitive market, customers perceive high-quality service as a crucial distinguishing factor among service providers, offering a competitive edge. Many businesses have implemented service quality programmes to evaluate customers' perceptions of overall service quality and its different aspects. The considerable interest and attention given to the measurement of service quality by researchers demonstrate its significance in the field. It is essential to establish systematic approaches to determining the factors that influence customers' intentions to repurchase and whether they will choose the same airline for future flights. This study aims to empirically examine the impact of service quality on customers' repurchase intentions by investigating the correlations between service quality, brand image, customer satisfaction, and repurchase intentions. While previous studies have investigated service quality and its effects on various industries, the specific combination of variables...
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examined in this study has not been explored in the aviation sector. Hence, this study aims to bridge the existing research gap in this area.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The airline industry is the most unstable and faces a strategic dilemma between revenue growth and customer retention due to strict regulations, intense competition, high operating costs, demanding customers, and the introduction of cutting-edge new technologies. Despite these difficulties, maintaining service quality is critical for customer retention in the aviation industry since customers expect exceptional service. Thus, the fundamental significance of service quality lays the foundation for developing a theoretical framework in this study. The study's overarching goal is to use findings on the associations between airline passengers’ perceptions of service quality, brand image, and customer satisfaction to forecast whether or not those customers would return for future flights.

Tourism and air travel are intrinsically interwoven (Duval, 2013). Air travel plays a vital role in both global commerce and tourism (Papatheodorou, 2021). Although various external factors can impact the aviation industry, its significance remains paramount (Munusamy et al., 2011). Helms et al. (2008) state that inadequate service quality is the primary cause of complaints in the aviation industry. Consequently, dissatisfied passengers have the choice of not selecting the airline for future travel (Yang and Hu, 2019). Hence, it becomes imperative to enhance the level of service by ensuring consistent service quality. In fact, the fundamental principles of quality management revolve around enhancing customer satisfaction through measures such as the development of more gratifying offerings (Sumathi et al., 2018). Park et al. (2004) and Cheng & Chen (2016) indicate that customer satisfaction and their perception of an airline's service quality play a crucial role in influencing their choice to fly with a particular airline. The concept of measuring service quality proposed by Zeithaml et al. (1990) has generated significant interest and extensive research on the subject.

Tourists opt for long-haul air travel to reach their desired destinations and engage in various activities (Ravishankar and Christopher, 2020). The service ratings of an airline determine its ability to survive in the fiercely competitive airline market (Kumar and Zymbler, 2019). Customers prioritise high-quality services, especially in the aviation sector (Farooq et al., 2018). As a result of intense competition, airlines consider the provision of excellent services as a marketing strategy (Ostrowski et al., 1993). Yas et al. (2019) suggest that airlines must exert additional efforts to attract and retain customers in today's aviation industry. To accomplish this, airlines need to comprehend and fulfil customer requirements. For airlines, it proves advantageous to employ systematic approaches to assess and identify factors that contribute to consumer satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2001). Based on the existing theoretical evidence gathered from the literature review, the current study puts forward hypotheses H1 to H5.

Service quality is an indicator of how well the company understands and meets the demands of its customers. Brochado et al. (2019) study findings add to the literature by highlighting the influence of service quality elements on the intention to refer and general satisfaction among diverse travel groups. The most common metrics to measure the attributes of airline service quality are as follows: Tangibility: State-of-the-art equipment, attractive facilities, well-dressed staff, and the latest facilities (Hassan et al., 2021). Reliability: The promise of punctual flights and safety (Rahim et al., 2015). Responsiveness: The sense of responsibility for achieving the desired results for passengers can be described as the most attractive attribute of an airline's service (Rezaei et al., 2018). Assurance: It refers to the airline staff's language skills, thoughtfulness, and ability to gain passengers' trust in maintaining...
service standards (Tsaur et al., 2002). Empathy: Airlines should cater to their customers' specific demands in order to capture their attention and loyalty (Psychogios & Tsironis, 2012).

Customers are more inclined to make repeat purchases if they perceive a high degree of service quality from an airline. Several studies have examined the relationship between airline service quality and repurchase intentions. For example, Park et al. (2005) found that airline service quality influences customers' willingness to buy tickets again or continue using the airline's services. Saleem et al. (2017) investigated repurchase intentions in the Pakistani airline industry and found a direct connection between service quality, trust, and the intention to repurchase. Overall, these studies suggest that service quality has a significant effect on customers' intentions to repurchase in the airline industry. Thus, we can hypothesise that H1: Airline Service quality has a significant effect on repurchase intention.

Shafiee et al. (2014) examined how brand image impacts passenger purchase intention in Iran's aviation industry. They found that the brand image and its components play a crucial role in influencing passengers' intentions to make a repeat purchase. Dirsehan & Kurtuluş (2018) argue that improving service quality, enhancing flight comfort, providing free refreshments, training cabin crew, and ensuring on-time departures are essential for establishing and maintaining a positive brand image. A study of Ayutthaya (2013) revealed that the perceived service quality of Thai passengers significantly affects the brand image of low-cost carriers. Pratisthita et al. (2022) state that brand image has an influence on consumers' purchase intentions when it comes to low-cost carriers. Additionally, the research by Huang et al. (2019) found that brand image is crucial factor in forming repurchase intentions for eco-tourism products. Furthermore, the study by Park et al. (2006) showed that passenger satisfaction and airline image directly impact future passenger behavioural intentions. Given that customer perceptions of the airline's brand image can impact the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention, it can be hypothesised that H2: Brand image has a significant effect on repurchase intention. H3: Brand image mediates the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention.

Customers repurchase intention, or customer retention, is crucial for defensive marketing strategies and overall business performance as it prevents customers from switching to competitors. Studies in the airline industry have consistently shown that improving service quality increases behavioural intention through customer satisfaction. Hussain (2016) concluded that customer satisfaction is vital for developing positive behavioural intentions, while Saleem et al. (2017) found that customer satisfaction acts as a mediator between service quality and repurchase intentions. Other studies in the aviation sector, such as Siraphatthada & Thitivesa (2019) and Decha (2019), have also demonstrated the strong influence of customer satisfaction on repurchase intentions. Bertuolo and Minciotti (2022) shed light on stakeholders’ perspectives on the theoretical and practical aspects of marketing concepts in their daily experiences.

Aradena (2020) suggests that tailoring airline services to meet passenger needs leads to customer satisfaction, affecting service quality and repurchase intention. Kadang & Sukati (2012) found that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention for Lion Air and Garuda Indonesia airlines. Similarly, Shah et al. (2020) found that passenger satisfaction mediates the relationship between airline service quality and behavioral intentions. Hussain (2016) also demonstrated the mediating effect of customer satisfaction, highlighting its importance in retaining and acquiring customers in a competitive airline market. The study findings of Padmavathi and Sunil (2023) demonstrate that the perceived recovery justice process significantly influenced customer recovery satisfaction, leading to a positive impact on their intention to repurchase. These studies collectively indicate the significance of customer satisfaction in the airline industry and its role as a mediator between service quality and repurchase intention. Thus, it can be hypothesized that
H₄ Airline customer satisfaction has a significant effect on repurchase intention. H₅ Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention.

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology put forth involves a descriptive study that seeks to examine the influence of airline service quality on the intention of IIA customers to repurchase. Samples were gathered and analyzed utilizing statistical analysis software.

3.1 Study Population

Determining the appropriate number of samples for a study on airline service quality with an unknown population involves several steps. First, it requires determining the desired level of precision, typically expressed as a margin of error or a confidence interval, such as 0.05 (Chen & Liu, 2017). Second, the desired level of confidence needs to be established, with the researcher deciding on the confidence level, for example, 95% (Hassan & Salem, 2021). Third, estimating the population standard deviation becomes necessary. In the absence of known information, a conservative estimate of 0.5 can be used as a placeholder value based on a previous study (Hair et al., 2019; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). The formula used to calculate the sample size is: \( n = \frac{Z^2 \sigma^2}{E^2} \). Here, \( n \) represents the sample size, \( Z \) is the \( Z \)-value for the desired level of confidence (\( Z = 1.96 \) for a 95% confidence level), \( \sigma \) is the estimated population standard deviation (0.5), and \( E \) is the desired margin of error (0.05). Substituting the values into the formula, we get:

\[
n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5^2}{(0.05)^2}
\]

\[
n = 384.16 \text{ (rounded up to 385)}
\]

Thus, the calculated sample size is 385.

Therefore, to assess airline service quality when the population size is unknown, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, a sample size of 385 is deemed suitable. In this case, 500 questionnaires were distributed to IIA passengers, resulting in 423 completed responses. Out of these, 279 respondents were male, while 144 were female. Additionally, for individuals below the age of 20, parental consent was obtained prior to conducting the survey.

3.2 Sampling Design

The sampling unit of the study comprised individual passengers at Chennai International Airport. This study utilized a convenience sample, where participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate. This sampling method has been employed in previous aviation industry studies (Akpoyomare et al., 2016; Ali et al., 2021; Begzjav & Prentice, 2018; Farooq et al., 2018; Law et al., 2022; Mohamed & Rani, 2016; Namukasa, 2013).

3.3 Collection of Data

The research questionnaire was structured to ensure reliable data collection. Prior to completing the questionnaire, respondents provided their informed consent verbally and in writing. Data was collected from passengers disembarking at Chennai International Airport.
Researchers made daily visits to the airport over a period of nearly two weeks, between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m., with the timing of visits planned around flight schedules. Section A of the questionnaire consists of queries regarding the quality of in-flight services, including "tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy." Section B includes questions about brand image; Section C includes questions about customer satisfaction; and Section D includes questions about repurchase intent. Section E, the concluding section of the questionnaire, consists of questions pertaining to demographic profiles, including gender, age, marital status, income range, current occupation, number of airline trips, purpose of travel, and flight class selected. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

3.4 Data Analysis

SPSS and AMOS 26 were used to evaluate the data. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) validated the measurement model. AMOS analyses CFA, and SPSS analyses EFA. SEM in AMOS tested indirect effects after measurement model validation. Descriptive statistics were used to express categorical data in terms of percentages and frequencies, while numerical variables were presented using means and standard deviations. CFA ensured the discriminant validity, dimensionality, and convergence of the research study questionnaire. The correlation matrix displayed Pearson's correlation coefficient for each construct. SEM elucidated the interdependencies among latent constructs. The confidence intervals for the regression model were set at 95%, with a significance level of P<0.05.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study’s findings hold significant implications for both practitioners and academics. It is crucial for airline managers to prioritize customer satisfaction in order to drive repurchase intentions. The overall satisfaction of IIA passengers with airline services was positive; however, the SERVQUAL assessment revealed that responsiveness and tangibility exceeded expectations for all IIA customers examined, while other aspects such as reliability, assurance, and empathy require improvement. The study emphasizes the importance of empathy as a crucial indicator of service quality, suggesting that extensive training is necessary to ensure its provision. This is particularly relevant considering that 44.9% of travelers were employed adults, with 54.8% traveling for business purposes, making them the primary target audience for the airline’s marketing strategy. Ultimately, the research findings shed light on the significant variables influencing repurchase intentions among airline customers and highlight the service deficiencies that airlines must address to foster enduring customer relationships.

4.1 Demographic Profile

The demographic and travel information of the respondents can be summarized as follows: In terms of gender, 66% of the sample consisted of males, while 34% were females. The age group with the highest proportion of respondents (28.8%) fell within the range of 31 to 40 years old. Around 66% of the passengers were married. More than 41.6% of the respondents reported having an income greater than Rs. 15 lakhs. Among those surveyed, 43.3% were employed. In the past twelve months, approximately 68.3% of the respondents used airlines for fewer than five trips. More than 52.2% of the participants indicated that their trip was for business purposes. Economy class was the preferred choice for the majority (53.9%) of those surveyed.
4.2 Reliability Test

The 36 items on the scale in the current study had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.766, indicating that the items were generally consistent, as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Prepared by the authors*

4.2.1 Tolerance value

Tolerance values for all observed values ranging from 0.774 to 0.968 are given in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of in-flight services Tangibility</td>
<td>0.968</td>
<td>1.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of in-flight services Reliability</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td>1.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of in-flight services Responsiveness</td>
<td>0.945</td>
<td>1.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of in-flight services Assurance</td>
<td>0.954</td>
<td>1.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of in-flight services Empathy</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>1.293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Image</td>
<td>0.939</td>
<td>1.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>1.226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dependent variable: Repurchase Intention

*Source: Prepared by the authors*

4.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis

EFA is a statistical method used to uncover the underlying structure of a large set of variables. Its main purpose is to identify the relationships between measured variables in factor analysis. EFA is necessary because the KMO score of 0.828 suggests significant variability in responses to statements. A score above 0.5 indicates that the extracted components are appropriate and share at least 50% of the variation. Therefore, the recommended similarities extend beyond assessing the fit of components to the items. The commonalities range from 0.503 to 0.945. The eight factors derived from the 36-item scale account for 73.171% of the variation, with the eliminated components explaining at least 70%. Cronbach's alpha statistic and relate it to the terms reliability and internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951). Reliability was demonstrated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and is a widely used measure of internal consistency and reliability, indicating the degree to which elements of a given construct or dimensions are positively correlated with each other. The general rule of thumb is that Cronbach's alpha values of 0.70 or higher indicate acceptable internal consistency (Cortina, 1993). Han & Hyun (2013) found Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.818 to 0.937 for components. In our study, individual Cronbach's alpha values for constructs range from 0.861 to 0.932.

4.4 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this section, a model is developed using elements that were extracted and identified in the previous section through exploratory factor analysis. CFA is employed to support factor loading and measurement, with AMOS graphics utilized for the CFA analysis. One crucial
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criterion for assessing the validity of the CFA measurement model is the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to the findings of Hsu and Lee (2009), the AVE values for service quality, perceived value, and total satisfaction range from 0.572 to 0.789, indicating a high level of convergent validity. Similarly, Mikulic and Prebezac (2011) found AVE values ranging from 0.736 to 0.812 for the constructs of service quality, image, and loyalty. These studies suggest that a convergent validity level of 0.5 or higher is generally considered acceptable. In this study, the AVE values for the eight constructs range from 0.572 to 0.789, meeting the acceptable criterion.

4.5 Interpretation of Factors

The degree of agreement within the variable items, as indicated by the corrected item-total correlation, reflects the extent to which each individual item is associated with the overall score. The individual constructs in this study have Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.861 to 0.932. As the Cronbach's alpha score exceeds 0.70, it signifies that the scale demonstrates internal consistency and is considered reliable (Cortina, 1993).

4.6 Structural Equation Modelling

The measurement model is evaluated using goodness-of-fit (GOF) indices, including Chi-square ($\chi^2 = 1586.191$), degrees of freedom (df = 566), DF/CMIN ratio (2.802), Root Mean Square Residual (RMR = 0.08), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.808), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI = 0.874), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.06). The experimental results indicate that all the fit indices met the recommended criteria (Hair et al., 2012), indicating a well-fitting measurement model (Hair et al., 2010; Byrne, 2016). Additionally, based on the empirical findings of Law et al. (2022), there is a positive relationship observed between service quality, customer satisfaction, and repurchase intention. The structural framework for the SEM analysis is presented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Framework for SEM Analysis](image)

Source: Prepared by the authors

The impact of airline passengers' perceptions of airline service quality on repurchase intention was examined using SEM, and the fit indices are displayed in Table 3.
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Table 3: Fit indices of structural model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Measurement Model</th>
<th>Structural Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square (χ²)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1586.191</td>
<td>1695.501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF/CMIN</td>
<td>Less than 3</td>
<td>2.802</td>
<td>2.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)</td>
<td>0.05 - 0.10</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>0.05 - 0.10</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of Freedom (df)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)</td>
<td>&gt; 0.80</td>
<td>0.808</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normed Fit Index (NFI)</td>
<td>&gt; 0.80</td>
<td>0.876</td>
<td>0.867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</td>
<td>&gt; 0.80</td>
<td>0.916</td>
<td>0.908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Fit Index (RSI)</td>
<td>&gt; 0.80</td>
<td>0.861</td>
<td>0.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucker-Lewis Coefficient (TLI)</td>
<td>&gt; 0.80</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>0.901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)</td>
<td>&gt; 0.80</td>
<td>0.874</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared by the authors

4.7 Testing of Hypothesis

The standardized path coefficient estimates the critical ratio and standard error. In the test statistic, a suggested critical ratio (C.R) value of > +1.96 indicates statistical significance. The hypothesized (H₁) association is positive and shows a significant relationship with all dimensions. The results of hypothesis testing can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of hypothesis testing (H₁, H₂ & H₄)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Predicted Relationship</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>C.R</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H₁</td>
<td>Service Quality --&gt; Repurchase Intention</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₂</td>
<td>Brand Image --&gt; Repurchase Intention</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₄</td>
<td>Customer Satisfaction --&gt; Repurchase Intention</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: β - Standardized Estimate; S.E - Standard Error; C.R – Critical Ratio.
Source: Extracted from SPSS 26v prepared by the authors

Hypothesis (H₁), which predicted a significant association between Service Quality and Repurchase Intention, is supported with a beta coefficient of 0.653 (p-value = 0.000). Therefore, Repurchase Intention is positively and significantly associated with Service Quality.

Hypothesis (H₂), which examined the association between Airline Brand Image and Repurchase Intention, is not supported with a beta coefficient of 0.069 (p-value = 0.136). There is no significant positive relationship between Repurchase Intention and Airline Brand Image.

Hypothesis (H₄), which investigated the association between Customer Satisfaction and Repurchase Intention, is supported with a beta coefficient of 0.054 (p-value = 0.024). Therefore, Repurchase Intention is positively and significantly associated with Customer Satisfaction.

Hypotheses (H₃, H₅) were evaluated for mediation to investigate the underlying mechanism through which one variable influence another via a mediator variable, with the goal of understanding the established relationship.

Hypothesis (H₃) examined the correlation between service quality and repurchase intention, finding a positive and significant association. The path model indicates that service quality has a negative relationship with airline brand image and a positive relationship with
repurchase intention. Therefore, there is no mediating effect of airline brand image on the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention.

The diagrammatic representations of the mediation effects on brand image and customer satisfaction can be seen in Figures 2 and 3. Mediators are factors that act as intermediaries between the independent and dependent variables. The objective of this study is to determine the effects of one or more intervening variables when they are randomly distributed between the independent and dependent variables. The results of the mediation effects are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

**Figure 2** Mediation model brand image

Table 5 Results of mediation effects – Brand image (H3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>C.R</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Quality --&gt; Brand Image</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.781</td>
<td>0.435</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Image --&gt; Repurchase Intention</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.634</td>
<td>0.526</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Quality --&gt; Repurchase Intention</td>
<td>0.257</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>5.466</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** β - Standardized Estimate; S.E - Standard Error; C.R – Critical Ratio. **Source:** Extracted from SPSS 26v prepared by the authors

Table 5 determines that there is no mediation effect of brand image on service quality and repurchase intention. Figure 2 is the diagrammatic representation of mediation effects.

**Figure 3** Mediation model - customer satisfaction

**Source:** Prepared by the authors
Examing the Role of Customer Satisfaction and Brand Image as Mediators Between Service Quality and Repurchase Intent with Reference to India’s International Airlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>C.R</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Service Quality --&gt; Customer Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>1.063</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
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<td>Customer Satisfaction --&gt; Repurchase Intention</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Quality --&gt; Repurchase Intention</td>
<td>0.249</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>5.338</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 Results of mediation effects – Customer satisfaction (H5)

Note: β - Standardized Estimate; S.E - Standard Error; C.R – Critical Ratio.
Source: Extracted from SPSS 26v prepared by the authors

Table 6 determines that there is a mediation effect of customer satisfaction on service quality and repurchase intention. Figure 3 is the diagrammatic representation of mediation effects.

Hypothesis (H5) examined the positive and significant association between service quality and repurchase intention. The path model reveals that service quality has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction, which in turn positively influences repurchase intention. Therefore, there is a mediation effect of customer satisfaction on the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention.

5 CONCLUSION

Tourism is heavily reliant on air travel and contributes greatly to the nation's economic prosperity. The airline industry is the most unstable and faces a strategic dilemma between revenue growth and customer retention due to strict regulations, intense competition, high operating costs, and demanding customers. Despite these difficulties, maintaining service quality is critical to customer retention as customers expect airlines to provide exceptional service. In order to provide consistent service and remain competitive in the marketplace, the airline business must operate effectively. This study attempted to validate the service quality model based on the perception of airline passengers. Therefore, this study aims to determine how well perceptions of service quality, brand image, and customer satisfaction predict repurchase intentions at IIA. The study employed a descriptive research method to empirically examine the proposed relationships among the variables. The hypotheses suggested that brand image and customer satisfaction mediate the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention, with service quality itself being a significant predictor of repurchase intention. To assess the impact of service quality on customers of IIA, the study utilized SEM, CFA, and EFA.

The finding offers an intriguing perspective on the relevance of service quality for future repurchase intentions. Both service quality and customer satisfaction variables demonstrate a significant impact, with no mediation effect of brand image on the relationship between service quality and repurchase intention. This indicates that airline customer satisfaction plays a crucial mediating role, particularly concerning repurchase intentions. In a nutshell, this study holds theoretical significance within the service industry and enhances our understanding of service quality and customer satisfaction. In the airline industry, customer satisfaction ratings are influenced by service quality. Hence, the study suggests that airline managers should prioritize service quality to achieve higher customer satisfaction and foster customer repurchase intentions.

Although this study offers valuable contributions to academia and the airline industry, it also has some limitations. Firstly, the research relied on a convenience survey, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the sample was gathered from a single
geographic area, potentially limiting the broader applicability of the results. Lastly, due to airport restrictions, data collection was limited to a two-week period. Evaluating and discussing the study's findings might have differed if data were collected over an extended period of time and across multiple geographic regions. Including different sampling methods, such as personal interviews, could provide further insights into passenger perceptions.

The present study examines the impact of service quality, customer satisfaction, and brand image on repurchase intentions of airline customers. Future research could consider additional variables such as word-of-mouth, trust, and brand loyalty to enhance predictions of airline customer repurchase intentions. Furthermore, investigating the perceptions of domestic passengers would provide valuable insights. There is also a need for further research, considering the projected growth in air transport demand according to the International Civil Aviation Organization (2022). Sustaining the predicted growth rate until 2036 could result in significant contributions to the global economy, including 15.5 million direct employments and $1.5 trillion to GDP. Considering the influence of world tourism, these figures have the potential to increase to 97.8 million employments and $5.7 trillion in GDP.

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